

From: FELDON Leah * DEQ [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, July 17, 2023 9:30 AM
To: DEQ [ALL DEQ] All DEQ Staff Statewide [REDACTED]
Subject: DEQ's DEI work and continual learning

Dear DEQ,

I want to acknowledge and express my concern and regret over two recent public incidents that have shown our agency has much work ahead of us as we move toward a workplace culture that embraces anti-racism and equity. These incidents demonstrate the very real harm that occurs regularly to our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) employees, and our white colleagues who are part of marginalized communities.

A few weeks ago, Water Quality staff were subject to a racist and antisemitic diatribe that was inadvertently broadcast during an online training session. This incident has prompted ongoing conversations about the timeliness of DEQ's response and will be the topic of a facilitated discussion on Aug. 2.

Last week, during a well-attended session to discuss the recently released [Organizational Assessment](#), participants witnessed aggressive resistance to the insight and analysis contained in the assessment, rather than open, thoughtful inquiry to promote understanding. Consultants from Engage to Change, who produced the assessment and facilitated the meeting, interrupted the dialog with respectful feedback to the speaker. Nonetheless, staff who were seeking an earnest conversation about the assessment were subjected to hurtful comments. To be clear, curiosity, questions and sharing of feelings about the assessment are welcome, but as we move into this work, we must think about others in the room and how our comments may feel for them. We must strive to do our learning in places and manners that do not continue harm.

Both of these cases are public examples of what DEQ BIPOC employees experience in often non-public ways, and we can and must learn from these instances.

I and the DEQ Leadership Team are currently engaged in reading and absorbing the Organizational Assessment. Among its lessons is the self-reflection required for progress to be made. For those who witnessed the two incidents described here, and those who may have heard about them, it is a good time to look inward and think about the impact on yourself and your colleagues. For those who were harmed, I am sorry.

The Leadership Team will continue discussing the OA in upcoming meetings and will start looking at the recommendations provided by ETC. It is too early in the process to begin outlining what the next steps will be for DEQ, other than to encourage continued conversations about the OA content. My commitment to you is to keep you informed as we proceed with this difficult but necessary work.

Leah

Leah K. Feldon
Director
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